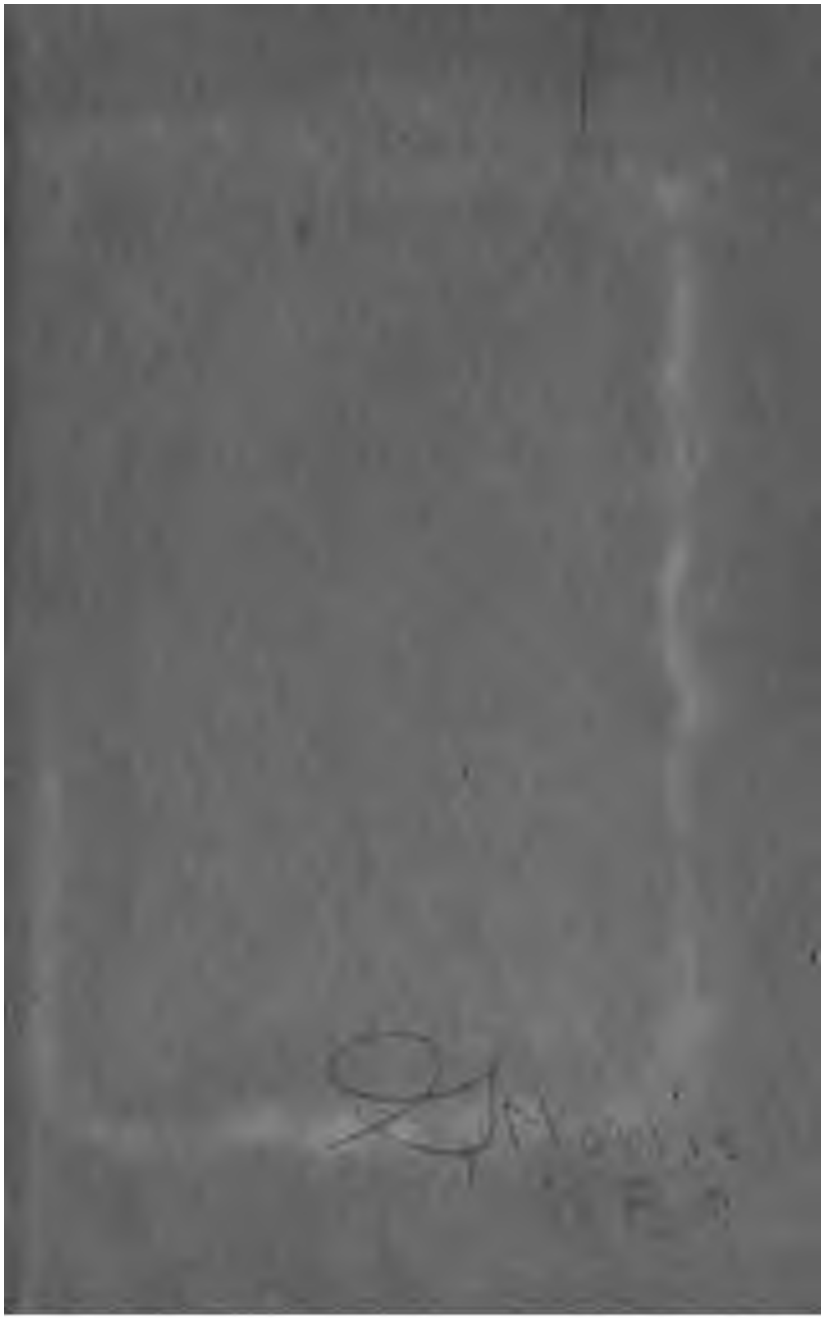


Putting on
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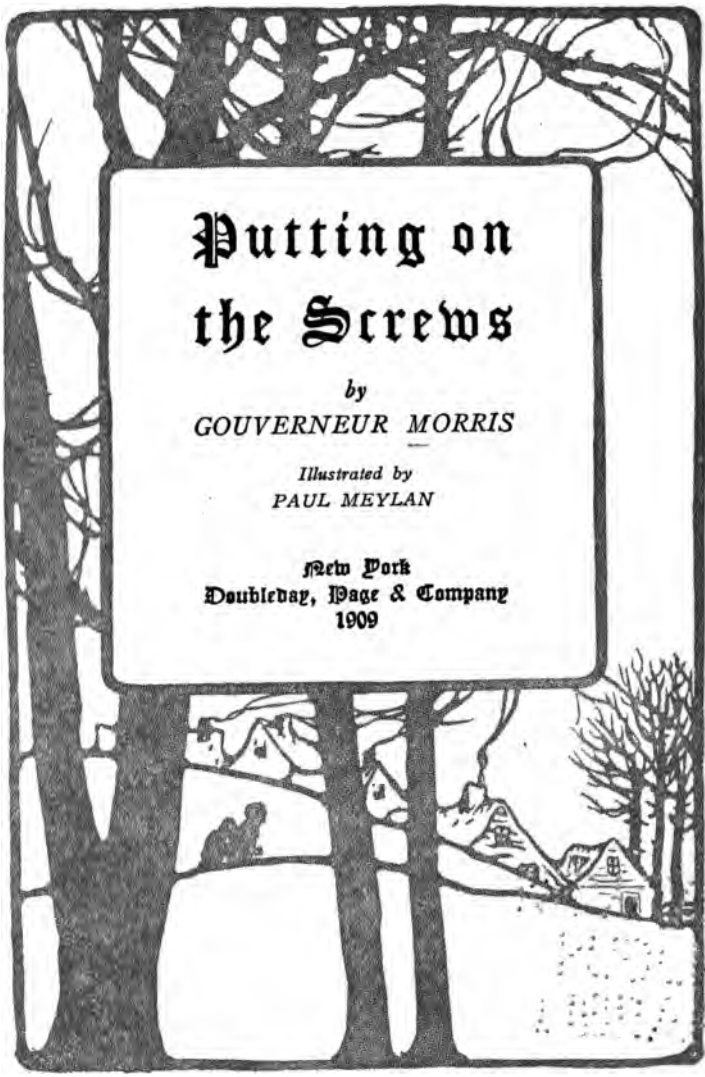
"'BUT, AUNT MARGARET, AREN'T YOU——?' AND HE LOOKED AT HER QUIZZICALLY, AND TAPPED HIS FOREHEAD. 'NO, I'M NOT,' SHE SAID TARTLY"



Putting on the Screws

by

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Illustrations


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I

COLES was very tired. The six to seven-thirty P. M. commuter's struggle with his kind had almost broken his temper. He had stood first on one foot and then on the other, from Chatham Square to New Rochelle.

Now he lay at ease upon his back in the cool bed, his eyes closed. His left hand lay where his wife could find it, when she had said her prayers and come in her turn to bed. When, at last, she was beside him and had taken the expectant hand and folded it upon her breast with both hers, he spoke.

"Ellery," he said, "I had a letter this morning from my mother's sister — from my Aunt Margaret."

Mrs. Coles pressed his hand closer to her breast. "She writes," he said "that she is down and out. That

she cannot get an engagement, because of her age and her infirmity. That she has no money; and no one in the world to turn to except her sister's son. Her letter was from Denver."

"Yes," said Mrs. Coles.

Coles was silent for a minute.

"She says," he went on, "that for her it must be us — or the poor-house. It was a very sad letter."

Mrs. Coles sighed.

"We are so many," she said.

"I'm a selfish pig," said Coles. "Do you know what my first thought was when I read the letter?"

Mrs. Coles said no, that she did not.

"I thought," he said, "that Harry wouldn't be able to drop in for the night whenever he wanted to. It made me feel mighty bad."

"Some day," said Mrs. Coles, "when we have saved up, we will build an addition."

As he did not answer, she pressed his hand still tighter.

"I don't see," he said, "how we are ever to save anything."

"It's curious," said Mrs. Coles, "how a man can be ever so clever and work all day long, and not get rich."

"There are thousands," said Coles. "But that doesn't worry me. The children have had or will have, every one of them, a sound education. And there will be the life insurance for you, and the home. Besides, I am not clever. I can work three hundred days in the year. But work alone doesn't make men rich — unless they can save."

"Couldn't we save?" asked Mrs. Coles.

"We're almost mean as it is, Ellery," said her hushand. "No, dear heart. We can't save. Our family has increased just as fast as my salary."

"At least," said she, "I thank God for that."

"You're just crazy about the kids,

aren't you?" said he. "But I tell you, lots of women think they're crazy about kids, but they don't insistywisty wist on having them." When her husband employed that long and curious word Mrs. Coles knew that he was feeling less tired and more cheerful.

"It's years," she said, "isn't it, since you heard from Aunt Margaret?"

"Years." And he added with some bitterness: "When one's relatives are prosperous they don't write to one much, but when they are broke and have no place to go ——"

"I thought," said Mrs. Coles, "that one of our rules was never to say things like that. 'Don't talk bitter and things won't taste bitter.' Didn't you write that in the Rule Book yourself? One penny, please."

One rule in the Rule Book provided for the fine that must be paid by any member of the family upon the infringement of any of the other rules; and whoever made, or was heard to

make, a bitter remark was fined one cent. It cost more to break other rules; only one cost less. If one of the Misses Coles was heard to wish that she was a boy, it cost her just half a cent. At the end of the year the grand total collected became the personal property of that member of the family who had contributed the least to it. The system had prevailed for eighteen years; and each of the nine children had won exactly twice. And this, because it was held that no child under two years of age *could* do wrong. Now, however, the contest was really and truly open to all. Ferdinand, the baby, had just enjoyed his second birthday and his last moment of total immunity. He had already been fined twice (at one cent) for scratching his nurse, and five times (at one cent) for incorrigible gluttony. And it was known, to the father and mother at least, that there were to be no more babies. For after Ferdi-

nand's birth the doctor had said that there must not be any more. And Mrs. Coles had wept, because she was ill and disappointed. She had always hoped for a round dozen. For expressing dissatisfaction she was fined one cent; Rule 79 stating explicitly:

"Those who express dissatisfaction often enough will soon alienate every vestige of that sympathy which they may really deserve. Fine for expressing dissatisfaction, one cent. For incorrigible dissatisfaction, twenty-five cents and a whipping." This last fine and punishment had never been inflicted in the family.

"Remind me in the morning," said Coles, "and I will put my penny in the till. Seriously, though, it is a terrible imposition — my aunt, I mean, not the penny. If she had ever given us a thought until she needed us, if she had ever written when you and I were engaged or when Dolly was born, if she had

ever taken the least trouble about us or the least thought for us, why, I'd feel as if I could put up with the burden of taking care of her cheerfully. But as it is — well, I'm not a man to be imposed upon!" Mrs. Coles smiled secretly in the dark.

"Of course," she said casually (but still smiling to herself), "you wrote her that it was impossible."

"What?" said Coles.

"Wrote her that you had a wife and nine children and that it's absolutely impossible for you to carry any more weight than that. I know you did it tactfully and kindly."

"I didn't."

"What, you didn't do it tactfully and kindly?"

"No, I mean I didn't do what you said I did. I wrote to her — you see at first glance her letter affected me very much. It *is* so pitiful when a woman has nothing and nobody, and says so, and throws

herself upon your mercy — that, without thinking, while I was still upset, I — I wrote her to come. Then," he went on hastily, "I began to think, and I got perfectly furious — yes, I did, furious — and first thing to-morrow morning ——"

"Don't you suppose," said Mrs. Coles, pressing his hand very tightly, "that I knew all along that you had written to her to come?"

They were both silent for a little while. Then Coles said:

"I'm afraid I've broken a serious rule, my darling."

"Yes?" she said, smiling.

"I have lied," said Coles impressively; "and it will cost me a nickel."

"What have you lied about, for mercy's sake?" asked Mrs. Coles.

"Why," said her husband, "I didn't write to the wretched woman at all."

"You didn't!" exclaimed Mrs. Coles.

"No, I didn't," said he, "I telegraphed."

There was a little choky break in Mrs. Coles's voice.

"Extravagance," she said. "One cent."

"I am getting it," said Mr. Coles cheerfully, "in the neck, all around."

They talked on for some time but with less and less energy, until, presently, Mrs. Coles began to breathe with great regularity. She nearly let go of her husband's hand, recovered it with a start, and was heard to mutter something about "My precious darling." A sense of great peace and happiness stole upon Coles. He even thought of his aunt's coming with pleasure. They would make much of her. It is a great thing to make others happy. So thinking or rather, feeling, he fell asleep.

The moment he was awake the next morning Mrs. Coles had a question for him.

"You said something," she said, "about Aunt Margaret's *infirmity*. Is it something particular — or just general?"

"I don't know," said Coles. "You see, I know so little about her — but she's pretty well on, and, I suppose, she's beginning to fail — why, Elly, it's nine o'clock ——"

"I know it is," said she. "It is also Sunday."

"Oh!" said Coles. "Why, so it is. Well, I never did!"

His face broke into many wrinkles of relief and pleasure.

"And, by the way," he said, "I've another sin to confess. I sent Aunt Margaret the money for her ticket to New York. How's that for naughty?"

He was in high spirits, as always after a night's rest, when once he was thoroughly wide awake.

"If I remember rightly," said Mrs. Coles, "in this family there is a fine

of two cents for evasion. The Book of Rules says:

"'All those who have evaded a sufficient number of issues are at present residing either in the poorhouse or in jail.'"

"All except Aunt Margaret," said Coles.

"Poor soul," said his wife.

II

WHEN you have done stuffing," said Coles to his united family at breakfast, "I want you to come into the big room" (it was about sixteen feet square) "for a family conclave — all except Ferdinand, who, since it is a bright morning, will go day-day with Jemima."

"Sorry, Father," said Dolly, who was the firstborn and eighteen, "but I've a date with Jim." She always talked perfectly frankly about "Jim,"

and, at the same time, she always coloured charmingly.

"We'll let Jim in on it," said Coles. "After all, he's almost one of the family." If Coles had not been a cheerful man he would have groaned inwardly. He loved Dolly and Jim very dearly, but he did not see how in the dickens they were ever to be married.

Jim was a good, honest, sweet-tempered, amusing soul, but he did not get on very well. He was a jack of all trades, and only faithful to Dolly. As for Dolly, on her marriage she would, if very exemplary, have for dower, perhaps, the grand total of fines for broken rules, and that would be about all.

"All right," said Dolly. "And if you're in doubt about anything, Father, I'm sure Jim will advise you." She and her father laughed at each other.

When Coles had left the room,

"'WHEN YOU HAVE DONE STUFFING . . . I WANT YOU TO COME INTO THE BIG ROOM FOR A FAMILY CONCLAVE'"

after lighting his pipe, all eyes were turned on Mrs. Coles; she smiled around the circle of rosy, chewing faces, and looked arch and mysterious. Bobby was the first to speak. He was the financier of the family. He had once peddled a new kind of puzzle about the station for a manufacturer who was a friend of his, and had made quite a large sum of money, the most of it, of course, belonging to Mr. Bierstadt. Whenever Bobby made a sale he put Mr. Bierstadt's money in his right-hand trousers' pocket, and his own commission in his left. But as the left had a hole in it (caused by the spontaneous explosion of a box of safety-matches a month before — never confessed — never mended — and momentarily forgotten), Bobby finished up his day as poor as he had begun it.

"Has Father struck it rich?" he asked.

"Oh," said Mrs. Coles, "it isn't

that kind of a conclave. I'll just say one thing. I think your father is going to tell you a story — a real story."

"'Bout what?" chimed Mary, aged four.

"'Bout a member of the family," said Mrs. Coles.

"Heavens!" said Dolly, "what has one of us been and gone and done? Peter — no, Peter's here safe and sound — I thought maybe he'd run away to ship on the *Reliance*."

Peter was eight. In his mind the name *Reliance* stood for the glory of the world, and the name Iselin for the greatness thereof. He knew the history of all past Cup Races and the only possible issue of all Cup Races to come. As for Benjamin Franklin — there was a great man — if you like — the Herreshoff of his time. Peter had a goat named Reliance, a pair of Reliance overalls, a Reliance nickel-plated watch, and best, of all, a boat named

Reliance, and this he sailed in a bathtub filled with water from the Iselin water-works, let in by a Reliance faucet. But, to go on to the bitter end, Peter was the most unreliable member of the family, liable only to upset lamps, to break windows, to run away from home, to bring strange and savage and muddy dogs into the house, to engage in street fights, to fling his cap under the wheels of passing automobiles, and to make terrible scenes when obliged to enter bodily into the aforementioned tub of water from the Iselin water-works. Ellery, aged six, was just like him. They had just missed being twins, everybody said, by a mere matter of two years.

"No," said Mrs. Coles, "Peter has not run away once to-day — it's now half-past nine. But the best way to find out what your father has to say to you is to finish your breakfasts —— "

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"I tell you, Mother," said Sam — he was the eldest of the boys — "give us leave to bolt our food just this once."

"Indeed I *will* not," said Mrs. Coles.

Sam sighed.

"The first thing I'm going to do when I'm independent is to swallow something whole. All our friends think," he went on scornfully, "that you allow us to chew gum. We've all got such well-developed jaw muscles."

"You're the healthiest lot of children *I* ever saw," said Mrs. Coles. "That's all I care about."

"But, Mother, *dear*," said Sam, "you can't really want *all* the girls to grow up with lopsided faces."

Dolly, at whom this was mischievously aimed, smiled. To the one person that mattered, hers was the most beautiful face in the world, and that was all she cared about.

"I admit," said Mrs. Coles, "that one of Dolly's eyebrows is a trifle

higher than the other. Do you attribute that to the fact that she chews her food?"

"Dolly," said Alice solemnly (she was fourteen, awkward and imaginative), "always looks to me as if she had listened to a great deal of nonsense in her life."

Sam, Dolly and their mother roared.

"Ask Jim," said Sam.

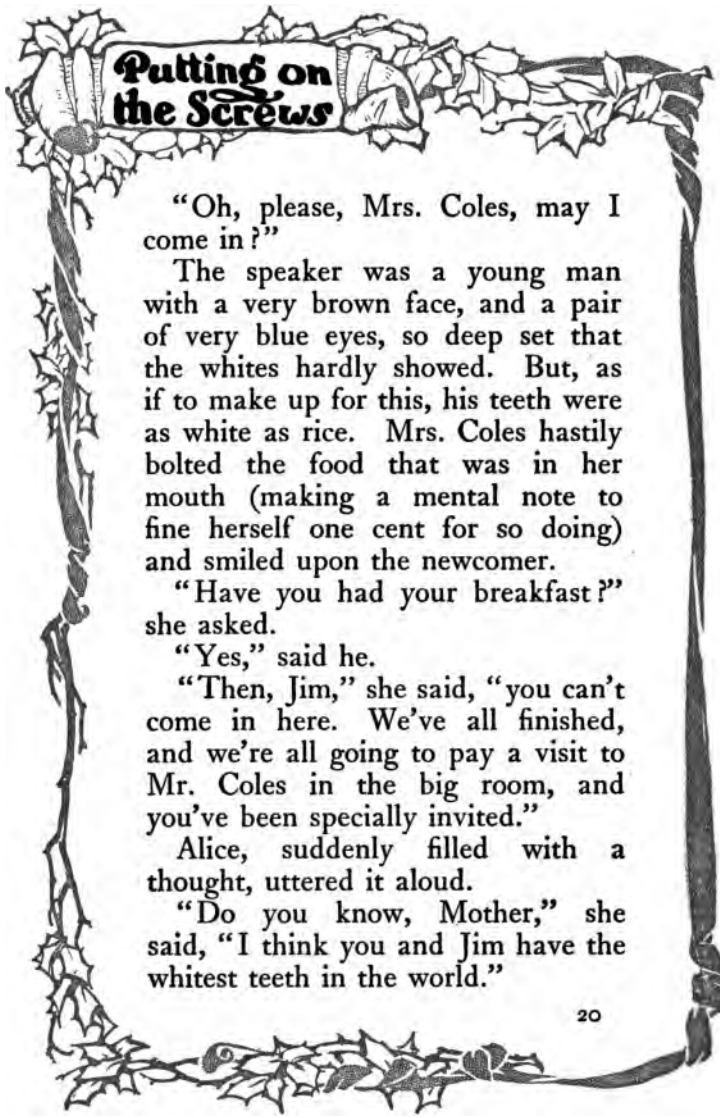
"It's her eyebrow," Alice persisted. "It has a kind of patient, physical look."

"Physical!" said Mrs. Coles. "What do you mean?"

"When grown people ask little children their names," said Alice explanatorily, "they wear a kind of playful, questioning look — that is, they look physical."

"Quizzical?" suggested Dolly, looking very quizzical.

"Yes," said Alice with a little gasp, "I think that must be what I mean —— "



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"Oh, please, Mrs. Coles, may I come in?"

The speaker was a young man with a very brown face, and a pair of very blue eyes, so deep set that the whites hardly showed. But, as if to make up for this, his teeth were as white as rice. Mrs. Coles hastily bolted the food that was in her mouth (making a mental note to fine herself one cent for so doing) and smiled upon the newcomer.

"Have you had your breakfast?" she asked.

"Yes," said he.

"Then, Jim," she said, "you can't come in here. We've all finished, and we're all going to pay a visit to Mr. Coles in the big room, and you've been specially invited."

Alice, suddenly filled with a thought, uttered it aloud.

"Do you know, Mother," she said, "I think you and Jim have the whitest teeth in the world."

"You've all got nice teeth," said Mrs. Coles. "It runs in the family, thank fortune!"

The family began to file out of the dining-room. Dolly and Jim were the last to leave it. This was a stratagem which provided Jim with the opportunity of kissing the back of Dolly's golden head "Good-morning."

Only Alice saw. And she made a mental note of the incident for her "Tragedy."

This was all in blank verse, and the blanks occurred whenever the hero kissed the heroine, and whenever the unrighteous villain said — blank!

III

AS MANY of the Coles family as could found chairs to sit on. The rest sat on the floor. Coles knocked on the mantelpiece with the bowl of his pipe for order.

Putting on the Screws

"Once upon a time," he began, "there was a man and his wife, and they had two daughters — hum — Joan and Jane. They lived in a New England village and they were very poor. The mother was an invalid, and Jane, the younger daughter, did the housework, the cooking and the washing and the plain sewing. Joan did a little fancy sewing when she felt like it, and made her father and mother laugh by the odd things she said and the odd way she said them. But she was a thoughtless girl, very self-centred, if she wasn't downright selfish; and though she wasn't pretty like Jane, she had a face that interested people the moment they saw it, and which they never forgot. They were both clever girls; but the housework and drudgery kept Jane down. She had no time for books or accomplishments. Joan taught herself to play the piano, to sing, and to recite quite wonderfully. She

could take old scraps of things and make charming costumes for herself. And she studied, too, in the school of experience. Even in a New England village human nature is large. All the young men were in love with Joan — or thought they were — and she encouraged them all. She loved to be admired and to be made much of. People said she was like a goldfish in a carp pond. Where every one was sober-coloured and methodic, she was a flash of brilliancy; variable, not to be depended on, but always shining.

"One winter the young people of the village got up amateur theatricals. Joan made a sensation; and she was so flattered by her success that she determined, in her secret heart, to go on the stage ——"

Here Alice sighed very deeply.

"But she knew that her father would oppose it with all his might and all his New England training,

and she hadn't the courage to speak to him about it. She grew sullen and discontented — and brooded on her father's poverty and the narrowness of the village and the stupidity of other people.

"Then one of Joan's particular young men really fell in love with Jane and married her, and Joan was in such a temper about it that the morning of the wedding she disappeared and did not return until after the ceremony.

"Her father was furiously angry with his favourite, and if they had been two men they would have come to blows. Joan borrowed a few dollars from one of her admirers and left the village. Her father burned everything that had belonged to her, everything that especially reminded him of her — her favourite chair, her Shakespeare, her music books. He never allowed her name to be mentioned; and a year later he had a stroke of paralysis and died. People

said it was sorrowing that killed him. The mother went to live with Jane and her husband, and, although they were terribly poor and soon had a large family of their own, they were always good to her and made her welcome, and went without things so that she should have them.

"For a number of years nothing was heard of Joan. The truth was she had changed her name and had gone on the stage, and was having a very hard time of it. I can't tell you much about her early struggles to get on, because I have never heard that story in detail. I don't know any of the people she knew or the kind of life she led. But I know she made a little success in a little part here, and a complete failure in a bigger part there. I know that she starved and worked as she had never worked before — when she had no money. When she had a little money she rested until she had

thrown it away. And she had a long illness; and she married her manager; and he deserted her because she was so ill; and she managed to divorce him. And then she married a man who wrote plays. Everybody thought he was a genius except the public. And they starved for a year or two, and, presently, he died. And then Joan's luck took a turn for the better. If she came on slowly, she came surely. You see she had real talents to work with, and she mastered them. The public began to think that nobody could play certain parts as she could; and her reputation grew. She made large sums of money and spent them, and larger sums and spent those. But she wasn't young any longer — and all of a sudden she broke down, as poor at the end of her career as she had been at the beginning of it — too sick and infirm to begin again, with no home, no family, no nothing,

but heartaches, perhaps, and disappointment.

"Have any of you ever heard of Margaret Peale?"

Dolly, Jim, Sam, and Alice held up their hands.

"That was the name Joan took when she went on the stage," said Coles. "Her sister Jane was my mother."

This announcement threw the whole family into a turmoil of excitement, and it was some moments before Coles could restore order.

"So she is you children's great-aunt," he said; "and, beginning tomorrow, she is going to live in the spare room." He held up his hand for silence. "She has had a mighty hard life," he said; "if she had faults it is not the time to remember them. It is only time to remember that blood is thicker than water. . . . If," he said, "we make a difficulty of having her, if we begrudge her the service and tolerance

due to her age and infirmity, we shall make a dismal failure of our efforts to do the right thing. I rely upon you," he said, "to make this poor woman happy and contented in this house."

He began to refill his pipe.

"Just to think," exclaimed Alice ecstatically, "that my great-aunt is a great actress."

Her father looked down upon her with a quizzical smile.

"Yes," said he; "and your sister Dolly is an excellent tennis playeress; and your mother is a good walkeress; and you are a promising writeress."

Alice blinked solemnly and turned from her father.

IV

THE hack-drivers of a small city like New Rochelle are not merely nuts and bolts in a machine, but well-known characters, house-

holders often, and citizens. It was an event to be driven by Corner-House Jim, Paul St. Pierre, or "Good Old Brady." And the Coles children, momentarily expecting their great-aunt's arrival with their father, were watching for one of these to turn the far corner into Neptune Place.

She came, however, from the opposite direction, alone and in a great red touring-car — alone — unless you consider the chauffeur to have been a human being. Perhaps he was, for his padded, oily gauntlet closed feelingly upon the oblong of dark-green paper which Great-Aunt Margaret Peale handed him after she had alighted. And as he set the great machine once more in motion he touched his hat to her. She watched him for half a block; gave a very French shrug with her thin shoulders, and, lifting several thicknesses of black veils and putting them back over her hat out of the

way, she turned toward the house, and her thin, distinguished, unhappy face smiled into a sudden radiance at sight of all the children in the open door.

A hurry call had brought Mrs. Coles running from the depths of the house, and she pushed the children right and left to make a passage for herself to the guest. Up till now Great-Aunt Margaret Peale may have doubted of her welcome. But Mrs. Coles was not the woman to leave the shy, the diffident and the hesitant in doubt. She sailed down the front steps, embraced Miss Peale, kissed her on both cheeks, slipped her strong arm around her waist, and so drew her affectionately up the steps and in among the children. Both had spoken phrases of greeting, but, so far, neither had listened to the other. Now, however, when all the children had been kissed and praised for bright eyes and rosy cheeks, Miss

Peale spoke and the rest listened, and, as you may have seen bees circling about the queen, apparently in one spot, but in reality drifting to another, so the whole group at the door passed into the hall, through it, and into the big room.

"I missed your father," said Miss Peale. Her voice was very sweet, gentle, a little husky and low, but at the same time a voice that you could not help but hear and listen to. "So I had my things expressed; was that frightfully extravagant?" — with a glance of half-humorous, half-pathetic appeal at Mrs. Coles. "And I thought of having myself expressed, and then, suddenly, I came face to face with Mr. Frohman, and he's always been so kind, and he sent me out in his car. What a pretty room!"

"I do hope you'll like *your* room, Aunt Margaret," said Mrs. Coles; "and that you'll be comfortable with us, and happy."

Miss Peale made no direct answer to this, but she smiled very brightly at Mrs. Coles.

"I even expressed my hand luggage," she said; "and that was very stupid of me. I'm sure I'm a sight for dust and travel stains.

She was not. Even the veil thrust carelessly back over her hat had an appearance of well-studied arrangement. And her trailing black dress looked just as if it had never been put on till that moment, and then by the most famous dressmaker of Paris, assisted by the most expert maids in all the world. She seemed the epitome of neatness, of grace and good taste. And when any of a thousand gracious and charming expressions moved her face out of its sad, set lines, she looked wonderfully young — as young as Mrs. Coles.

She stood now with her back to the fire and her left arm thrown lightly about Alice, who was red as

a beet and beaming at being thus singled out by her famous relation.

"How wonderful," said Miss Peale, "to have so many wonderful children. But I mustn't praise them or they will come to misfortune. But I shall love them all with all my heart, and that won't hurt them, will it? Oh, Ellery!" and she smiled at Mrs. Coles, "I do envy you. I do wish I could begin all over again — and have what you have. But I couldn't begin now, could I?"

Then, looking more youthful every moment, she made the really astonishing statement that she was sixty-five.

"You will never make me believe that," said Mrs. Coles.

Now, although Miss Peale showed every mark of a wish to please and to praise, she showed also much of that absent mind so common among distinguished people. As, for instance, many a great man would leave his deathbed to talk, but would

not abandon one single, solitary moment of his time to listen. When Mrs. Coles said, "Would you like to see your room?" (and that the room should give pleasure meant much to Mrs. Coles, for she had been working since early morning to make it attractive,) she received no answer whatever. Miss Peale suddenly crossed to a picture on the opposite wall, and stood before it in silence for some moments. It was a picture of a little, old-fashioned house, covered with vines and fronting upon a village street of elms.

"Oh!" she said, "I haven't seen it since I was a girl — except here" — she touched her forehead, and her eyes were very bright. "That was my room — where the pipe vine makes an arch — what a little room that was — not much bigger than a double bed, and the roof came down so — and so — and cut off big chunks of standing-room. The paper had pictures of Venice on it, and in

winter when I was almost frozen to death they used to seem terribly satirical and out of place. This was your great-grandfather's room — on the northeast corner. He might have had a south room; but he was like that — always combative and stern, and making himself uncomfortable on purpose. He always slept with his window open — I don't believe that there was another person in New England who did that when I was a girl — and sometimes the snow had to be shovelled out of his room with the big, wooden snow-shovel. And sometimes, when it was even colder than usual, birds would get in and shelter themselves — poor things, it must have been cold comfort. And I remember the first time a man proposed to me — I was sitting in the first fork of the cherry tree — see, just to the left there. And I giggled so that I fell out. And I've forgotten the man's name. But

I remember that he carried his handkerchief in his shirt-sleeve instead of his pocket, and we used to poke fun at him for it, but secretly we thought it a most distinguished thing to do. He caught me when I fell out of the tree, and I decided to swoon in his arms, but he wasn't very strong, and he let go and fell down himself. And when we had got up, although his left knee hurt him very much, he began to propose again, but I said: 'United we stand, divided we fall,' and that the man who could catch me and not hold me was not the man for me —— "

She broke off suddenly. She had allowed her voice to rise to unnecessary strength and she had been talking with an excitement not altogether necessary. She seemed to realize this. She subdued her voice almost to a whisper.

"I think I will go to my room," she said.

But at that moment Coles was heard letting himself in at the front door, and there was a stampede of children to meet him and tell him that Aunt Margaret had arrived in a big, red devil-wagon.

The two women were left alone for the moment.

"My dear," said Miss Peale, "I want to cry. Nobody was ever made so welcome before in all the world, and when I think that I can't hear those children's dear voices, nor yours, nor any sound of this happy house I — I could cut my throat. I thought you would find out sooner," she said; "but you didn't. You see, I wouldn't have had to come to be a burden on you — if I hadn't gone stone deaf."

Mrs. Coles started to answer with energetic affection.

"It's no use," said Miss Peale, smiling pitifully, "I haven't learned lip reading, and I can't hear a word you say."

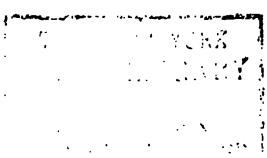
Her back was to the door, but she did not move a muscle when Coles entered with loud and cheerful words of greeting.

"She can't hear a word," said Mrs. Coles; but she whispered it as if fearful that Miss Peale might hear.

V

IT WAS some time before the family got used to Miss Peale's deafness. Her face was so alert and intelligent that it was next to impossible to realize that the mind behind — so far as sounds went — was a blank. And at first, when she was present, unless directly addressing her, they spoke in low, embarrassed tones. The younger ones were the first to fall into their natural manners, and to credit her with no more ears than the umbrella-stand — and to argue and discuss before her

"'MY DEAR,' SAID MRS. PEALE, 'I WANT TO CRY'"



without modification of statement or impassioned rhetoric. But she sat more often in the spare room that had been made over to her than downstairs. She had a few books in which she seemed to take pleasure, the list evincing a really singular catholicity of taste: The Bible was one, Roxanna was another, The Massarenes, Phroso, The Bar Sinister, The Bab Ballads, odd volumes of Shakespeare, the first Dooley book, and Alice in Wonderland. And she could pass, in the hour, from King Borria Bungalee Boo to King David with perfect aplomb and enjoyment; or she would sit with Mr. Dooley in her hands and Hamlet, prepared to delight in either, unable to decide which. She had a large, half-finished square of ribbon-work embroidery upon which she sometimes employed herself, but to so little purpose that it was impossible to note any progress from week to week. Indeed, and she

said it herself, she had been at the thing so long that for years it had resembled an antique.

In many ways she added to the pleasure of the family life. She could be very interesting, very vivacious, and very sympathetic. But, financially, she had begun from the very first to be a burden: in the smallest ways, but in a hundred of them. It was not, however, until a month after her arrival that Coles and his wife, with the fear of being ill-natured upon them, so much as mentioned the matter.

It was Sunday morning and Coles had waked half an hour before the time to get up. His mind, for he had not slept well, was full of the checks he had drawn on Saturday, and after hesitation he waked Mrs. Coles and asked her if she was too sleepy to talk. She said that she was, but Coles did not pay any attention to that, and went right on.

"I wish," he said, "that we could find some tactful and decent way to cut down Aunt Margaret's expenses. They're not serious in themselves, but they are just heavy enough to destroy the balance between what I earn and what we have to spend to keep going. I drew the checks yesterday, and I had to let two small accounts run over. It's the first time in a good many years that I've had to do that."

"She really *ought* not to have any expenses," said Mrs. Coles.

"Perhaps," said Coles, "considering the money she has earned and spent in her time, she is showing wonderful self-control now. You see, she hasn't asked me for a penny of money, but she keeps me spending little sums that will amount in a year to a real sum. How many letters do you think she's averaged a day — since she's been here?"

"I've no idea."

"Eleven," said Coles. "I worked it out last night from my cash accounts. That's six dollars and sixty cents' worth of stamps a month — seventy-nine dollars and twenty cents a year!"

"Whom does she write to?" asked Mrs. Coles, for that side of the question interested her also.

"Ellery," said Coles, "if you were a cat I know what would be the death of you."

Mrs. Coles sighed.

"I don't see why she should have to write so many," she said.

Coles ignored this.

"She has been to town twice," he said. "She doesn't ask me for any money — so she has a few dollars left, probably — but she had a hack to the station each time, and a hack back, and she charged them to me. And it's only a half mile to the station — and both days were pleasant — and she takes much longer walks for exercise, so I don't quite see ——"

"I do think you could speak to her about the hacks," said Mrs. Coles.

Coles considered.

"Well, I won't say anything this time," he said. "Perhaps she's trying harder than we think to settle down and not be a burden."

"I wish ——" began Mrs. Coles, and then closed her lips tightly.

"What?"

"Oh, only that she would make a little more effort about getting down to breakfast. Sometimes she stays in bed and pretends she doesn't want any breakfast, and wouldn't eat any if she had it. Of course, I can't let her starve, and often as not I have to have something cooked especially and sent up. I notice she always eats it. And then she says: "Ellery, dear — I'm such a burden — I wish I was dead. If you'll only call me in time I'll be down on time — every single morning. I declare I will!'"

"Why don't you take her at her

word?" said Coles. "She certainly seems to wish to be obliging about it."

"I can't take her at her word," said Mrs. Coles, "because she locks her door, and, of course, I can pound on that till I'm black in the face, and she doesn't hear."

"By George!" said Coles. "Locks the door — what an awful thought!"

"Silly — yes," said Mrs. Coles; "but why awful?"

"Suppose," he said, "the house caught fire and we couldn't wake her."

"Couldn't you burst it open?" said Mrs. Coles.

"In novels," said Coles, "people burst doors open; but in real life the heroes, of whom I am one, would burst long before the doors."

"Then," said Mrs. Coles with finality, "you must keep an axe handy."

"Oh, no," said Coles; "I'll speak to Aunt Margaret about locking her door."

"I wish you would," said Mrs.

Coles, "because the extra meals do cost money — and then, somebody has to carry the trays upstairs and down again. I think if you'll write it all on Aunt Margaret's slate she'll understand and not be offended."

"Well," said Coles, "we'll try." And then, in the act of yawning and getting out of bed: "Alice," he said, "is getting stage crazy. She talks about nothing but writing plays and acting them. She carries her manuscripts to Aunt Margaret and gets altogether too much praise."

"I think I was like that," said Mrs. Coles, when I was Alice's age."

"You never were Alice's age," said Coles; "you never will be. Besides, you were the most rough-and-tumble tomboy I ever saw in all my born days." Then he laughed aloud like a boy. "Do you remember our first meeting? You had your foot caught in a picket fence and had been hanging head down for about twenty

minutes." Then he roared with laughter. "You had red flann ——" But he was not allowed to finish.

VI

FERDINAND had gone day-day. Mr. and Mrs. Coles, Sam, Alice, Bobby, Richard, Peter, Ellery and Mary had gone to church, the males with good-natured unwillingness, Mrs. Coles righteously, Alice with a view to dramatizing the Bishop of Nova Scotia who was to preach, and Mary, aged four, with the religious fervour of an early Christian.

Miss Peale from her window watched the progress of the procession.

She looked gravely at Coles's broad shoulders, bowed a little by desk work; her eye of an artist commended Mrs. Coles's made-over hat and her strong, ushering way of walking. Then she smiled with a kind of elation,

for there seemed to her a soulful comicalness about the twinkling of so many sturdy legs in brown stockings.

"Ah," she thought, "that happy pair don't have to erase and correct — they have nothing but clean sheets to write on. But a professor might study me through a reading-glass and he wouldn't discover more than a word or two of the original text."

She turned from the window and caught sight of herself in the mirror. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "You clever, slipshod, ambitious, scheming, selfish, thoughtless, affectionate, lying, truth-seeking, horrible, deaf old woman, why don't you drop dead and have done with it?" She was partly amused with her own accusations of herself, partly in earnest about them.

Then she picked up her slate and went out of the room, noiselessly as always, and down the stairs, and pushed open the door of the big room.

The sofa in the middle of the room

showed her two depressions that were still rising into place. And the right side of Dolly's hair was rumpled, and the left side of Jim's. So Dolly's right cheek was redder than her left, and Jim's left was redder than his right. Miss Peale burst out laughing.

"I can't help it," she said.

Jim, both cheeks red now, and grinning broadly, came to her and stretched out his hands for her slate. He wrote a sentence on it, and held it up for her to read. She laughed again. Jim had written:

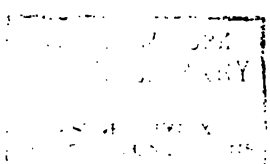
"*We couldn't help it, either.*"

Then Miss Peale said:

"I came on purpose, hoping to find you. May I stay just a little while? It's about Jim I came."

She drew a chair near the fire, and resting her elbows on her knees leaned forward and spread her long, thin, nervous hands to the blaze. Then she turned her head and spoke to them over her shoulder.

" . . . THE RIGHT SIDE OF DOLLY'S HAIR WAS RUMPLED, AND THE LEFT SIDE OF JIM'S "



"Whenever I have the chance, Dolly," she said, "I study Jim's face. I'm rather good at faces. You see, I've had so much practice in making my own look different things. Jim," she said, "will you get me a glass of water?"

Jim was very glad to leave the room at such an acute personal juncture. When he had gone Miss Peale spoke swiftly to Dolly.

"That boy is all the good things, Dolly — faithful, clean, affectionate, honourable, and not stupid — why doesn't he get on?"

Dolly snatched the slate and wrote on it:

"*Because he can do too many things well, and likes them all.*"

"It was very impertinent of me to ask," said Miss Peale; "but, being deaf, I am eaten up almost with curiosity about some things. Is there any one line that he likes best?"

Dolly wrote:

"*Outdoor things.*"

"Good!" said Miss Peale, and she passed the little sponge across and across Dolly's answers. "I know somebody," she said, "who could use Jim. And I think I can do something about it. I'm not sure, dear; it's nothing to be very elated about, but it's my reason for asking questions."

Dolly leaned forward swiftly and kissed Miss Peale, and immediately, as if with the premonition that a kiss had been lost that he could never recover, Jim entered, balancing a glass of water upon a tray.

Miss Peale glanced from the water to Jim, and they both laughed.

"But it wasn't altogether an excuse," said Miss Peale. "I'm really very thirsty." And she drank the whole glassful to prove it.

Then she rose to her full height, and looked for a moment exactly like the Duchess of Towers in Peter Ibbetson. And she spread out her hands toward Jim and Dolly, just as, previously,

she had spread them toward the fire. And she smiled rather wonderfully and said, "Bless you, my chilrden." Then she started for the door — stopped suddenly — swayed ever so little — clinched her hands — then relaxed them — and went on and out.

"She's not well," said Jim. "Better see if she want's anything, Dolly."

Coles, whether the sermon had been good, or because church was over, felt at peace with the world.

"I think," he said, so that only his wife could hear, "that for the present we won't say anything to Aunt Margaret. We must give her a little longer to get used to poverty and the ways of our house. Don't you think so?"

That she may have been the cynosure for all the eyes in New Rochelle did not concern Mrs. Coles one bit. She reached out for her husband's hand and squeezed it hard.

"Of course," he said, but rather

huskily, "I'm not the kind of man to be imposed on. And if she doesn't mend some of her ways after a fair trial — I'll put the screws on."

At which point he darted forward like one demented and snatched Mary back from a passing vehicle, into which, still wrapped in religious ecstasy, she had been about to walk. Then he fell back beside Mrs. Coles.

"I'd rather," he said excitedly, "see that child an atheist than see her run over."

"My dear," said Mrs. Coles, "so would I. And I'm sure the good Lord would, too!"

Sam had overheard.

"If we were all atheists except Mary," he said, "our average as a religious family would still be very high."

When they reached home Dolly was waiting for them in the hall. She was quite excited.

"Aunt Margaret isn't at all well,

Papa," she said; "Jim's gone after the doctor. Is that right?"

"Of course," said Coles. "What seems to be the matter?"

"She seems to be hot and cold by turns," said Dolly; "and I think something hurts her somewhere, but she won't say it does."

Mrs. Coles had already reached the top of the stairs, in a flutter of anxiety, sympathy, and efficiency.

VII

FOR half an hour Doctor Barbour remained in Miss Peale's room. When he came out his face wore a perplexed expression, neither cheerful nor grave. And he came down the stairs to where Mr. and Mrs. Coles were waiting for him, slowly and thoughtfully, as if pondering what he should say to them.

"Come in here, Doctor," said

Coles, and he pushed open the door of the big room, from which the children had already been shooed like so many chickens. When he had closed the door behind him Coles said: "Well, Doctor, how is everything?"

"Miss Peale," said Doctor Barbour, "may have a touch of malaria. But I think not. It is my opinion that her attack has more in it of the mental than the physical."

"What must we do for her?" said Mrs. Coles, nearly always practical.

"If I did not know you so well, Mrs. Coles," said the doctor, "I'd say: be very kind to her; be very gentle with her. Don't worry her about anything. Spoil her a little. Try to tempt her appetite."

"I'm mighty relieved that it's nothing organic," said Coles.

"Sickness of the nerves," said the doctor, "is often more puzzling. By the way, she should have something

stimulating to drink — say a sherry glass of port wine three or four times a day."

But it was not until his next question had been answered that Coles suddenly found himself beginning to count the cost.

"How long is she likely to be ill?" he asked.

"Oh," said the doctor, "her condition was arrived at slowly. She is not young. She will come around slowly. Often a change of season or of climate is the turning-point."

"Do you mean," Coles asked, with an attempt to look natural and cheerful, "that she may not recover until spring."

"If you could take her South," the doctor suggested, "I think it might be very beneficial to her."

"I'm afraid that's out of the question," said Coles. ruefully. "I'm not a millionaire."

"Well," said the doctor, "there is

no cause for alarm, at any rate. I will run in again in a day or two."

He shook hands with them both and hurried away. He slipped on the front steps, recovered himself nimbly, and chuckled aloud, whether at the slip or at some sudden thought which amused him is unknown.

Mrs. Coles slipped her arm around her husband's waist.

"It's hard, Ellery," he said, and his voice trembled slightly. "I want to think only about Aunt Margaret and what to do for her. And all that I seem able to think about is the cost: tempting her appetite — port wine all her meals and between meals — sent up — everybody waiting on her from morning till night — the doctor running in every day or two. Ellery," he said, "I sound so mean. Tell me, dear, that you know I don't begrudge the money — and that I'm only upset — because I haven't got it."

"I *do* know it," she said, and after

a moment's silent sympathy. "Will it cost several hundred dollars?" she asked.

"If she is ill till spring," he said, "it will cost all of several hundred dollars that will have to — be — borrowed."

They were silent again, and for a longer time.

"Well," said Ellery, "I hate debt, and I fear it, but I see clearly, if I never saw it before, that there must be credit to make the world go round. You and I," she said courageously, "will borrow what is necessary, and *pay it back.*"

He folded her in his arms, and she clung to him, and they rocked to and fro, a regular old Darby and Joan couple, and were comforted.

"Now," said he, after a time, "let us have a look at Aunt Margaret and cheer her up. We must make her understand that as long as she has got to be sick we wouldn't have her

elsewhere for thousands. Do you think," he said, "that, by some feminine intuition, she could possibly know that we have been discussing her expenditures behind her back, and making her out rather a burden? Maybe she guesses. She's very clever. And maybe worrying over it had something to do with making her ill? We've got to reform, that's all there is about it. Now look here, Ellery. Certain things have got to be done, haven't they? We both admit that. Well, then, I swear to you that I won't begin to count the cost until I have to. And you must make me the same promise."

No two happier people ever shook hands upon an agreement, and they went up to see Miss Peale with hearts as light as thistle-down.

She had been crying. And her long, white hands were trembling.

"Oh, my dears," she said, "when I came I promised myself to be ever

so negligible and considerate, and behold, I have descended upon you like a ton of brick."

She shivered through her whole length, and pulled the bedclothes close around her chin.

"I didn't mean," she went on tremulously, "to be an anxiety and an expense." And then she smiled at them, and there was a twinkle in her eye. "I wouldn't mind," she said, "if you weren't such dears, and had begrudged and looked things — even if you didn't say them. But," and the twinkle went out of her eye and she spoke with an earnestness that was almost solemn, "you are good people. Not as some are good, but as the best are good. And you bring home to me — I know you'd rather die than do it, but you *do* do it — all the sins and thoughtlessness and selfishness of my life. Oh!" she said, "that Hell in which they tried to make my generation believe

— with its wide-open, hungry mouth, and the flames rushing out and curling around the lost souls and dragging them in — if there isn't such a place there ought to be, for people like me."

Mrs. Coles closed the poor, excited woman's mouth with a kiss, and Coles busied himself putting wood on the fire.

"I don't want to be a burden and an expense," wailed Miss Peale. "I don't want to be hated."

Coles couldn't stand that.

He began to look about nervously until, presently, he had found Miss Peale's slate.

"I'm going to tell her," he said, in the firm voice of one who will brook no contradiction, "that my salary was substantially raised on Saturday — and that if I have a care in the world it is *not* money. Her mind has got to be at rest about that, anyway."

Miss Peale, after her wailing outburst, had closed her eyes. Ellery

leaned over her smiling esctatically, like a guardian angel. There was silence in the room, save for the crackling of the renewed fire, and the "skreaking" of the slate-pencil upon the slate.

The next piece of writing that Coles did that day was in the Fine-Book. He made an entry therein under the head of "Deliberate and Wilful Lying."

VIII

MISS PEALE'S deafness did away with the nuisance of whispering and walking on tiptoe. The younger children raced about the house as usual, shouting and laughing. Every weekday morning the school-goers poured from the front door like a flood of sunshine, their stout boots ringing on the pavement or squeaking like mice in the

snow. And when school was over they played their games under the sick lady's very window.

But upon Coles and his wife silence settled more and more. Steadfast in their resolve not to count the cost, their hearts and minds were yet full of it, and it was seldom now that badinage and pranks and laughter bore testimony to their perennial love for each other. I do not mean to imply that they became solemn and downhearted and pulled long faces (indeed, they bore their burden with a wonderful serenity and patience), but they fell into habits of silence, sat often for half an hour with their arms around each other, but not a word exchanged.

To the unprofessional eye, Miss Peale was no worse. She still managed to produce her daily quota of letters, to eat the delicacies prepared for her, and to take pleasure in being visited by the children. The Fine-

Book furnished her with particular amusement; and it was now kept on the table in her room, and whenever an entry had to be made, the culprit after making it was obliged to show her what had been entered. Since the united fines for any year represented but a very small sum of money, it was a touching fact to note how seldom Dolly's name appeared. The picayune reward of virtue really represented a material advantage to her and Jim. As to Miss Peale's promise to interest herself in Jim's welfare, it had come to nothing. She had sent for Dolly one morning not long after the arrival of the mail and had taken her hand in both hers and caressed it for a while before speaking.

"Dolly," she said finally, "the person whom I thought might be able to use Jim — already had somebody. I'm sorry, terribly sorry. I really counted on doing some good to somebody."

Putting on the Screws

Dolly had not really expected anything from her great-aunt's promise, yet she and Jim were human enough to fortify themselves, now and then, with remote possibilities, and the announcement that this one had gone agley was a real blow to her. Miss Peale saw the hastily concealed look of disappointment and sighed a little bitterly. But she kept hold of Dolly's hand.

"You and Jim are so young, Dolly, so very young — waiting is the one real sickness — but when you are very young you can recover from it and be — as if it had never been. I know one thing," she said very emphatically, "I *know* it. I know that one of these days Jim will find himself. Lots of men have had to cast in every pool of the river before they landed a fish; and Jim has not finished fishing the shallows at the mouth."

Dolly wrote on the slate:

"*Papa is the best and noblest and*

cleverest man in the world, but he hasn't been very successful."

Miss Peale shook her head.

"If your father isn't successful, Dolly," she said, "I don't know success when I see it. But you mean that he isn't rich. Stevenson said, and he knew, 'To be honest, to be kind — to earn a little and to spend a little less,' and to make a family on the whole happier for his presence in it — or words to that effect — was all the success that could be asked of the utmost fortitude and delicacy. Isn't your father all those things?"

Dolly had guessed some time since that her father was not spending "a little less" (quite a little more, in fact), but she nodded an emphatic affirmation to Miss Peale's question.

"His house is his, and in order," said Miss Peale. "His children are healthy and happy, at school or graduated. He is desperately in love with your mother and she with him. His

oldest girl is engaged to his favourite young man. He carries a heavy life insurance. And you say that he isn't very successful."

Although Dolly suspected that her father was in trouble about his affairs, she felt that she had been very properly scolded, and after hesitation she took up the Fine-Book and made an entry under "Misleading Statements."

Toward the end of February a new type of visitor began to find the way to the Coles's doorbell — usually on Sunday or in the early evening. And sometimes, for your collector is not a tactful man and is armed as a rule with a penetrating voice, the younger children even received hints that their father was being asked for money which he was promising to pay.

Poor man and wife, to whose hospitable hearts the ringing of the doorbell brings a start of dread; who learn to hate the postman's cheerful whistle;

who through no fault of their own are beginning to drift with the tide!

Finally, Coles borrowed money from the bank in which he was employed, lumped his debts, and paid them; so that once more the door-bell sounded in the house with a merry jingle, and the postman's whistle piped cheerfully in the frosty air.

But have you ever as a child built a wall of sand to hold back the tide? So, for a while, Coles stemmed the inevitable — only to see his crumbling defences swept away — and the waters rush over them with redoubled zest. He had tried to patch his wall at first with a shovelful of sand here and another there; and these, of course, had but added to the extent of the final demolishment.

Evil days came swiftly now. The doctor visited Miss Peale more frequently, and stayed longer at her bedside. She was no better, and he qualified that and said it was tantamount

to saying that she was worse. In addition to current expenses Coles had to meet the interest on his loans. Ill-omened visitors began once more to come on Sundays and in the early evening. And the man's heart, though he kept a cheerful and gentle expression upon his face, was lead. But it was not until April Fool Day that the real blow fell.

Ferdinand, the baby, in the midst of the highest pranks and spirits, became suddenly weary and held out his arms for his mother to take him in her lap. And when she wished to put him in his crib he cried, not with the lusty cry of temper, but with the piteous cry of the child that is sick, very sick. And presently he became hot to touch, and began to droop and wilt for all the world like a flower. This about noon.

At two o'clock Mrs. Coles sent a hurry call for the doctor. And the doctor came and got a spoon from the

dining-room and strapped a disk of burnished metal over his right eye, and looked in Ferdinand's throat. Then, and Mrs. Coles had never seen him hurry before, he rushed out of the house and came back anon, his pockets bulging with culture tubes and antitoxin. And Mrs. Coles held Ferdinand so that he could not struggle, and was helpful and practical and weeping bitterly at the same time, all the while the doctor squirted the antitoxin into the child's circulation.

Then the doctor established himself in the big room as in an office, and first he sent for Dolly and gave her an immunizing dose, and joked with her, and chucked her under the chin; and then he spied Sam "passing" a baseball in the street, and enticed him into the house with honeyed words: "Just a minute, Sam — on a matter of importance — nobody can help me but you." And

he dosed him. And he had the cook up, and the two maids; and the cook, when the hypodermic needle pierced her side, began to say the Litany of her church and to whimper like a sick wolf. But the doctor whispered to her to forget her fears and to hide behind the sofa and look forth and see how the others took it. And the first maid to be fortified against infection kept saying in gentle, melancholy tones, "Jessie — Jessie — Jessie"; it is unknown why. But when she was sent to join the cook behind the sofa she protested that she had not been hurt, which was true; and that she had not been frightened — a statement which President Roosevelt could hardly have made good for her. And she and the cook nudged each other and giggled heartlessly while their fellow-servant, laughing and squealing hysterically, took her medicine.

Then the doctor waylaid the children as they came in from school

and dosed them. And, be it said, they were all stoical, though afraid; and he collected cultures from all the throats in the house and sent them off to the Board of Health, and then he went up to Miss Peale's room and behaved toward her as if hers was the only illness in the world, and his concern for her his only concern. But then he had grown to be firm friends with Miss Peale, and she spoke to him unreservedly of many things more important than symptoms.

The news that greeted Coles when he came home that night almost unmanned him. His heart began to beat very rapidly and he had hard work to control his nerves. But Mrs. Coles had put on her most cheerful face and her most loving look to strengthen him. And when, after a minute or two, he went with her to have a look at Ferdinand, he had already accustomed his broad shoulders to their new burden — to the

thought that perhaps Death, too, was hastening with the other creditors, to the door of his house.

IX

PERHAPS the surest cure known to medicine is the cure of diphtheria by antitoxin. In nine cases out of ten if administered in good season it behaves more like a magic than a medicine. But Ferdinand's was a tenth case, and when twenty-four hours had passed his throat was neither better nor worse, and his temperature had gone up a degree. Doctor Barbour, very cheerful and very confident, administered a second and larger dose of antitoxin. Coles, dressed temporarily like the doctor in a white sheet, his hair covered by a handkerchief knotted at the corners, watched the process gloomily and listened with anguish to the baby's

heart-breaking breathing. He had lost hope. Which shows, perhaps, into what a state the whole gamut of his troubles had cast his usually buoyant nature. Then and there he said good-bye to Ferdinand and occupied his mind with what he should do to comfort Ellery when all was over.

Coles and the doctor, having smiled reassuringly on Mrs. Coles, passed into the next room, with its bottles, basins, alcohol lamps and smell of carbolic, and having slipped out of the sheets which covered their clothes and the handkerchief caps, and having washed their hands in carbolic, went into the hall, far from all chance of being overheard by Mrs. Coles, and looked at each other gravely.

"Well?" said Coles.

"Is there any one," said Doctor Barbour, "whom you would like to have me call in consultation?"

"If there is any man in the country better than you," said Coles, "I want him."

The doctor bowed gravely. "I would like to have Harrison see Ferdinand," he said. "But mind you," and he grasped Coles's arm, "I *think* the child will live."

"I think you are doing everything that can be done, Doctor," said Coles; "but if — if he doesn't get well, it wouldn't be good to think — for any of us, but especially for my wife — that Harrison might have suggested something."

"If I can't get Harrison," said the doctor, "I will get Ripley."

Coles moved about the house for an hour, now tiptoeing to Ferdinand's door to listen, now opening a window wide and standing in the fresh rush of air, now picking up a book, opening it, preparing to read, and then putting it down, in four evenly timed processes. At last Dolly brought him

a message from Miss Peale — would he speak with her a moment?

Miss Peale was dressed ready to go out. She looked very pale and weak, but resolved.

"My dear boy," she said, "you've got altogether too many troubles. I'm going to relieve you of one."

His eyebrows rose in question.

"I've made arrangements," she said, "to go to a home for the aged and infirm. I know something about the cost of things," she went on hurriedly, "and I know that through me you have had to spend more money than you have got. I've done you a cruel wrong. And you've been very noble."

She held out both hands to him. He took them and pressed them. He felt very tenderly toward her. Then he wrote on her slate:

"*When you were in trouble we stood by you. Now that we're in trouble you must stand by us.*"

He smiled, tears in his eyes, and handed her the slate.

"Just what does that mean?" she said tremulously. He took the slate once more, and wrote:

"*It means go back to your own bed where you belong, and get well among your own people, and don't talk nonsense.*"

She looked at him until his tired, haggard face swam before her eyes. Then she walked to the window and looked out. Then, suddenly, she leaned her head upon her arms and began to sob.

Coles tiptoed out of the room and began once more to move about the house. But for some reason he was less despondent. It occurred to him that, perhaps, little Ferdinand might get well. For the first time in twenty-four hours the thought of money entered his head. He drummed with his fingers upon a window-pane and wondered how much Doctor Har-

rison's visit would cost. Then he heard a step in the upper hall and began to tremble. "They are coming to tell me that Ferdinand is dead," he thought. He dashed upstairs, slipped into his sheet and knotted handkerchief, and tiptoed into the sickroom. He and Ellery exchanged wan smiles.

There was no change in Ferdinand's condition. But to ears attuned by anxiety and love it seemed that it was more of a struggle for him to get his breath.

Coles bending forward from the waist, his head turned to one side the better to listen, did not move for twenty minutes. And there was no sound in the room but that of the child's snuffling, rasping efforts to breathe. You would not have believed that so little a child could make such powerful efforts.

"His poor little nose is all stopped up," Ellery whispered. "That's what makes it sound so terrible."

"Sounds a little easier to me," said Coles, that easy and polished liar.

At about ten o'clock Doctor Harrison arrived with Doctor Barbour. He remained about a quarter of an hour, made a careful examination of Ferdinand, and said that all that could be done had been done.

"He is holding his own," he said. "That is the most I can say to you. But any change in his condition will be significant. The first dose of antitoxin is spent. It is too soon to look for results from the second. On the one hand, the child is very sick; on the other, antitoxin, when administered in the early stages of diphtheria,is almost infallible." Then he shook hands with Ellery and Coles, and said that it had been a pleasure to meet them, and went out with Doctor Barbour. Ellery, crying softly, but otherwise self-possessed and efficient, cleaned Ferdinand's nose with boric acid and turned him a little in his

crib. Ferdinand spoke disjointed words, whined a little, and once more took up the matter of getting air into his lungs.

"The little man's game," said Coles. "He's game, darling. He'll win out."

That night about three o'clock Coles fell asleep in a chair. It was the first rest he had had in two days and a night. And, at that, he only fell into a half-sleep. The least sound would have waked him — even in his sleep, he told himself that. So that it must have been with complete silence that Miss Peale entered the room and stood looking at him. She could not for some moments make up her mind whether to wake him or let him sleep on. Her face wore the expression of an angel — a happy, good angel.

She touched his shoulder and he woke instantly.

"Ferdinand is better," said Miss Peale.

Coles sprang to his feet.

"Come," she said. She laid her hand on his arm and they went upstairs together and into the sickroom.

"Ellery wouldn't be asleep," said Miss Peale, "if he wasn't better." And then she made a statement that, coming from her, ought to have astonished Coles; but he was too much excited to put two and two together.

"I have listened at the door," said Miss Peale, "every fifteen minutes or so, and he is breathing more easily. Listen."

Coles listened and knew that she had spoken the truth.

"He's going to get well," cried Coles.

"Not so loud," said Miss Peale softly.

Then it was that he turned and looked at her in amazement.

"You heard what I said?" he asked. "Have there been two miracles to-

night? Can you hear what I am saying?"

"Perfectly," said she; "but you mustn't talk so loud."

"I'm so glad for you," Coles whispered, his eyes round with wonder. "I'm so glad. When did it happen? How did it happen?"

But she only smiled, laid her finger on her lips, and glided from the room.

X

COLES knocked on Miss Peale's door.

"Come in," she called. He went in, his haggard face radiant.

"The doctor has just gone," he said. "He says that Ferdinand is out of danger."

"Thank God for that!" said Miss Peale.

"And now," said Coles, "about the ears."

"It's rather a long story," said Miss Peale. "I have been writing in the Fine-Book under Deceit. Would you care to look?"

Coles smiled and turned the pages till he came to Deceit. Under this Miss Peale had written her name, and Coles looked from the entry to Miss Peale with a blank expression.

"Isn't Dolly pretty sure to win this year?" asked Miss Peale.

He nodded evasively.

"Dear boy," she said, "I've never been deaf, and I've never been poor — that is, not for years and years. It's a bona fide fine."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" said Coles slowly.

"For passing myself off as deaf — and poor," said Miss Peale. "Oh, I thought," she went on, "that there was no goodness in the world. That people had no real use for other people unless they could get something out of them. And I was very cynical and

misanthropic — not without some reason. But I was getting old, and it seemed terrible to me to be all alone and to get older and older and die — without any family or anything. And I kept thinking more and more of you and yours. I said, 'Will they give me affection and be kind to me?' And the answer was, 'Yes — rich old woman — with not so many years to live, they will give you what will seem like affection and kindness.' I said, 'If I go to them asking for charity — will they take me in?' The answer was, 'Probably not — but it's worth trying.' So I wrote on impulse — and you told me to come and be taken care of. My heart warmed, I can tell you. But I said, 'He will be sick of his bargain when he finds out what a nuisance a pauper aunt is.' And I said, 'Even if they're decent about it to your face, they'll curse you out behind your back.' So I decided to be deaf. And I came,

and you were all so kind! It was too good to be true. I said, 'Wait a little.' And I began to make myself expensive for you to keep. But you wouldn't complain. So I put on the screws tighter and tighter. I pretended to be sick — I had to confide in Doctor Barbour — and I began to run you into debt. And still you wouldn't complain. Then, to see what would happen, I proposed to go to an asylum. And you wouldn't let me. Then I said, 'There are good hearts in the world — there are people who are unselfish. There are people who will go down hill — to the very bottom — rather than be unkind!'"

She took the big-shouldered man in her arms and kissed him on both cheeks.

"If I talk sentiment any more," she said, "I shall scream and howl and possibly have hysterics — because I'm so happy!"

Then — the tears running down

her cheeks — "We'll talk business," she said.

"Oh," said Coles. "Must we?"

"Why," said she, "aren't you dying to know how rich and comfortable we are all going to be?"

"Yes," said Coles, laughing, "I am."

"When I got tired of throwing money away," said Miss Peale, "though it isn't generally known that I ever did get tired of it, I began to save and invest. I bought some lots in Portland, Oregon. And I bought some mining stock — and — I don't know how much I made — it was sinful. And all the while I was earning good money, and investing in this and that. And I got in on one of the Long Island land booms. And I've been lucky — oh, so lucky! But money's a lot of responsibility. And my holdings are beyond me — quite beyond me. And I've thought that perhaps you could leave the bank — and manage my affairs for me — and

all and all. And you'll need a head assistant, a young, emphatic man who can do all kinds of things — you see, there are mines and buildings and a ranch and land — and I thought Jim would be just the person ——"

"He would," exclaimed Coles, "he'd be just the man. But, Aunt Margaret, aren't you ——?" and he looked at her quizzically, and tapped his forehead.

"No, I'm not," she said tartly.

"Well," he said, "I've worked up in the bank until I am earning a good salary."

"A good fiddlesticks," said Miss Peale. "But I'm not offering you a salary — I'm offering you an income — and, besides, all that I have goes to you and yours when I die. Man alive, don't look so perplexed! I'm not talking to you in terms of necessities. I'm talking to you in terms of automobiles and greenhouses."

"Do you mean it?" he asked.

And, when she nodded, "I'm going to tell Ellery," he said. He turned at the door. "You wouldn't let me tell her — would you," he said, "unless it — it was all true?"

"I would cut my throat first," she said. And he looked at her a while and knew that she meant it, and he came back and kissed her.

Coles put on his sheet and knotted handkerchief, and went into the sickroom. Ferdinand had come uphill almost as fast as he had gone down. He was deeply sleeping, cool, comfortable, and breathing like a lamb. But Coles did not tell Ellery about the money at this time; he saw by her eyes, yearning joyfully over the baby, that in her heart was room for no more glad tidings.

She was the last member of the family to know about the change of fortune, and she cared the least about it.

Putting on the Screws

Jim stood on the pavement in front of the house; he had been denied admittance by Doctor Barbour himself. But Dolly had been watching for him, and she threw open one of the windows of the big room.

"Jim," said Dolly, "we've struck it rich."

"Honest Injun?" he doubted.

"Honest to Gospel," said Dolly, and she crossed herself just over where her heart had been before she gave it to Jim. "And you're in it, too," she said. "And there's twenty-five thousand dollars of it, all mine."

"Dolly," said Jim, "you feel all right, don't you? I don't know how diphtheria develops — but ——"

"The first symptom," said Dolly, "is brass, and the second is brazenness. And I've talked with Papa, Jim, and I'm going to talk with Mamma, and then I'm going to name the day."

Alice, being in the corner with a